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Chairman: Mr. Asadi ..... (Islamic Republic of Iran)
later: Mr. Prendergast (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Jamaica)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 95: Operational activities for development (*continued*) (A/C.2/53/L.9)

Draft resolution on preparations for the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2001 to review the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children (A/C.2/53/L.9)

1. **Mr. Dahlgren** (*Sweden*) said that the short procedural draft resolution responded to paragraph 27 of General Assembly resolution 51/186.

2. Sweden welcomed the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/186), which provided an update on progress towards the end-decade goals, within the context provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and highlighted the major challenges that remained to be met before the Summit's promises for children could be kept. The report showed that much remained to be done to ensure that the special session to be held in 2001 would be as important as the World Summit for Children.

3. Sweden therefore proposed that the General Assembly should postpone to its fifty-fourth session the consideration of the arrangements for the special session, so that the United Nations and Member States would have time to hold the necessary discussions and prepare an appropriate resolution, while still leaving nearly two years for the formal preparations for the special session.

4. Owing to the procedural nature of the draft resolution, no additional sponsors had been sought, but Sweden hoped that the draft would be adopted by consensus.

Agenda item 94: Environment and sustainable development (A/53/25, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/96, A/53/156–S/1998/78, A/53/165–S/1998/601, A/53/371–S/1998/848, A/53/416, A/53/425, A/53/487)

(a) Implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including the outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 (A/53/477)

5. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the work of the Second Committee had, understandably, been dominated thus far by the world economic crisis, but that it was time for the Committee to turn to another crucial area of its work: the consideration of long-term development issues, including environment and sustainable development.

6. At the current session, the discussions would focus on the Secretary-General's proposals for strengthening the work of the United Nations system in the areas of environment and human settlements, which were directly linked to the Committee's consideration of the Secretary-General's report on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development (A/53/477).

7. More than a year had passed since the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, at which the progress made since the Rio Conference had been reviewed. In the interval, the Commission on Sustainable Development had changed its emphasis, focusing more on strategic sustainable development issues than on a chapter-by-chapter review of Agenda 21. In addition, better coordination had been introduced between the Commission and other bodies working to build a global consensus on the policies to be implemented in critical sectors for sustainable development, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, which continued to bring many countries together in a common understanding of sound forestry policy.

8. The Commission on Sustainable Development had also proved to be an effective forum for genuine dialogue between Governments and other stakeholders, such as industry, trade unions and non-governmental organizations. The outcomes of its work were action-oriented, as shown by its strategic approaches to freshwater management and the agreements reached among stakeholders on the issue of voluntary initiatives through which the private sector could undertake to improve its environmental performance. Those activities were complemented by the many local, national and regional initiatives being taken, particularly through national councils for sustainable development.

9. The Commission on Sustainable Development would tackle new challenges in 1999. It would deal, *inter alia*, with issues relating to oceans, since the Commission was the only forum that covered all aspects of those issues, including not only the legal and scientific dimensions, but also pollution control and coastal zone management. It would also consider tourism, which, though it was one of the fastest-growing economic sectors and a major source of income for many countries, could also have a profound impact on environmental and natural resources. Lastly, the Commission would evaluate the Barbados Programme of Action in connection with the five-year review to be conducted in 1999. Work would also be done on agriculture and

sustainable development and on energy and sustainable development, which were on the agendas for 2000 and 2001, respectively. It should be noted that the Commission on Sustainable Development had decided to elect the members of its Bureau at the end of each session so that they could follow and participate in the preparations for the subsequent session.

10. With respect to the impact of the reform of the United Nations Secretariat, especially the integration of three departments into one, the new Sustainable Development Division continued to provide technical cooperation, particularly in the areas of energy and water resources, and more synergies would be created in the future between support for the intergovernmental process and technical cooperation activities. It would also be necessary to strengthen analytical capacities, not only with respect to environment and sustainable development, but also in all areas in which the General Assembly required inputs that would enable it to review long-term development trends.

11. With respect to the Secretary-General's report (A/53/477), it should be borne in mind that the role of the General Assembly and of the United Nations Secretariat was not to interfere in the conference processes, but to strengthen the linkages among the various conventions from a cross-sectoral and integrated perspective.

12. **Mr. Boullé** (Director of the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction) introduced the report on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/53/487) which was submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraphs 4 and 10 of General Assembly resolution 52/200.

13. The report first elaborated on the scientific and technical aspects of the El Niño phenomenon, which had dominated the global climate in 1997 and 1998 with greater strength than ever recorded. Although recent technological developments and increased interest worldwide in natural disaster reduction had contributed to vastly improved skills in the forecasting of the El Niño phenomenon, further improvements continued to pose major challenges to science. Efforts in that direction were being spearheaded by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

14. Secondly, the report analysed the opportunities and requirements for preventive action in order to make communities at risk more resilient to the impact of future El Niño events. The recurrent nature of such events offered opportunities for optimized vulnerability reduction, based on a sound understanding of past events and the prediction of future events. It was therefore essential to take preventive measures based on science and technology, such as early warning systems and climate prediction and monitoring, as well as measures in the socio-economic domain, such as zoning regulations, building standards, contingency planning and the strengthening of coping capacities.

15. Thirdly, the report attempted to present an overall view of the socio-economic impact of the 1997–1998 El Niño. Unfortunately, however, little conclusive information on global losses had been available at the time of its preparation and there was no commonly agreed methodology for the assessment of damage. A gap therefore existed in the timely assessment of El Niño damage and the provision of reliable statistics to guide future actions. A further crucial problem at the country level was how to decide whether specific damages incurred should be attributed to the El Niño phenomenon.

16. Looking beyond pure figures, the natural disasters caused by El Niño had tragic consequences for people and communities. They destroyed crucial infrastructure and vital networks and temporarily deprived the population of shelter and basic social services. They also severely disrupted economic activities at the macroeconomic and local levels and impeded economic competitiveness, while investment in sustainable development was marginalized and progress very often halted.

17. It was for those reasons that the General Assembly had included the item in the agenda of its fifty-second session in recognition of the fact that the affected communities could no longer limit themselves to compensating the loss of lives and property and that the only affordable solution lay in disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation.

18. As indicated in paragraphs 30 to 33 of the report, through the Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño, the United Nations system had adopted an overall strategy for reducing the impact of the El Niño phenomenon which brought together the scientific and operational capacities of the whole Organization, a unique forum allowing for a system-wide, multidimensional and multidisciplinary strategic approach.

19. The process towards improved disaster reduction would form a key component of the overall evaluation of the achievements of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, scheduled to take place in Geneva in 1999 as a complement to the discussions at the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. In addition, an international conference on early warning systems for the reduction of natural disasters, held in Germany in September 1998, had reconfirmed the potential of early warning systems. In that connection, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was continuing its work

on improving the assessment of the social and economic impact at the country and community levels.

20. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/200, which requested the Secretary-General to promote an intergovernmental meeting of experts that would form the cornerstone in shaping a concerted process of cooperation, the first such meeting was due to be held in Ecuador in November 1998, with the participation of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), WMO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and various other actors. It would provide for the first ever system-wide scientific and technical retrospective of the El Niño phenomenon and would establish a platform for the development of sustained future strategies based on concrete data. Peru had offered to host a second meeting, which would emphasize the role of decision makers and the operational application of specific knowledge on El Niño.

21. The recommendations in the conclusion to the Secretary-General's report should provide the necessary guidance to Member States. If Member States applied the existing means in a concerted fashion, they would be able to achieve positive results in disaster mitigation and prepare themselves for a future recurrence of the El Niño phenomenon.

22. **Mr. Amin** (Director of the Regional Office for North America of the United Nations Environment Programme) said that he would deliver the statement of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who had had to go to Nairobi to participate in the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment.

23. The past year had been a decisive one for UNEP in that its role and mandate had been redefined by the Nairobi Declaration. The report of the Governing Council of UNEP (A/53/25) reviewed the work of the Council at its fifth special session, at which it had considered key concerns raised during the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. The recommendations of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, which were included in the report of the Secretary-General on environment and human settlements (A/53/463), would also have significant implications for the deliberations of the Second Committee on environment and sustainable development.

24. The fifty-third session of the General Assembly had so far been dominated by discussions on the impact of the current global financial turmoil, which would undoubtedly be an additional impediment to the collective struggle of the international community to inject the concept of environmental and social sustainability into the design and implementation of economic policies. The immediate economic crisis could have the effect of masking a whole range of long-term environmental problems which portended immense consequences for the socio-economic well-being and security of nations. UNEP would therefore endeavour to ensure that the gains which had been made in international environmental protection over the past two decades were not reversed.

25. At its fifth special session, the Governing Council had adopted a number of reforms, as well as new priority areas for UNEP action. With regard to internal reform, the organizational structure of UNEP was being remodelled in accordance with the Nairobi Declaration, with a view to achieving greater policy coherence and more effective programme delivery. The United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) had assumed responsibility for all administrative services of both UNEP and Habitat, thus allowing for administrative economies of nearly 30 per cent. That saving, the "environment dividend", would be used to fund the substantive activities of UNEP programmes.

26. The first major area in which UNEP would be concentrating was the development of an early warning capacity, not just in terms of environmental emergencies, but also with regard to monitoring environmental trends. The aim was to link monitoring, assessment, early warning and emergency response mechanisms.

27. Secondly, UNEP was concentrating on industry and technology transfer, including cleaner production and voluntary initiatives with the private sector, which had a major role to play in promoting sustainable development.

28. The third priority area was information, assessment, monitoring, diagnostic analysis and action programmes for freshwater management. Using a new global environmental monitoring system for freshwater, UNEP was laying the foundations of a system for predicting "hot spots" and environmental emergencies, so as to alert Governments to take the necessary steps to use their water resources rationally. With the support of the Global Environment Facility, it had initiated a global international waters assessment, taking into account socio-economic variables. That assessment would make it possible to provide information at a level of disaggregation that would be useful to decision makers at the national and regional levels.

29. In line with its support to Africa, UNEP had under way several initiatives, including a project to help African countries deal with the growing ecological impact of large cities on the continent's water resources. Within the

framework of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa, the joint UNEP-Habitat project would assist African countries to put in place early warning mechanisms for timely detection of potential "hot spots". Finally, in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNEP had organized a Pan-African conference on sustainable integrated coastal management in Maputo, Mozambique, which had adopted the Maputo Declaration establishing a framework for regional cooperation and management of marine and coastal resources.

30. The fifth area of concentration involved the coordination and development of environmental policy instruments. Within that area, remarkable headway had been made with regard to two international legal instruments designed to ensure the safe management of hazardous chemicals that moved across borders. The Prior Informed Consent Procedure Convention for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade had been adopted at Rotterdam, and negotiations for a global legally binding instrument on persistent organic pollutants had been initiated in June 1998. Continuing with its focus on law, UNEP was concentrating on its support to the environmental conventions and was working to develop coherent interlinkages and coordination among them, as mandated at the special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21. Those efforts were described in the report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development (A/53/477).

31. With regard to other activities, he said that the High-level Committee of Ministers and Officials would be meeting in Buenos Aires on 10 November 1998 to provide guidance on reform of UNEP, financing of sustainable development and the contribution of UNEP to the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In that connection, UNEP and the World Trade Organization (WTO) would be hosting an international conference on sustainable tourism in small island developing States and other island States. That conference would be followed by the twentieth session of the Governing Council of UNEP, which would be considering the topic of tourism, the ongoing reform of UNEP and the work programme for the biennium 2000–2001.

32. In conclusion, he said that he wished to reiterate that UNEP needed a solid financial base in order to discharge its strengthened mandate and meet the growing environmental challenges worldwide. Over the last few months, there had been a positive trend in contributions, and it was to be hoped that the further focusing and revitalization of UNEP would result in the further strengthening of financial support.

33. **Mr. Hapsoro** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, considering the number, the importance and the interdependence of the environmental conventions, the coordination of work related to them was essential. Furthermore, the reports on the implementation of those conventions stressed the need for consistency in policies and actions. Coordination was not easy because the conferences of parties to the conventions were autonomous bodies, and the secretariats were scattered around the world. The task of the current meeting was to review the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the fulfilling of commitments undertaken at Rio and reaffirmed at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. In that regard, the report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, which suggested lines of action to be taken to strengthen the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) should be considered by the General Assembly under agenda item 30. With regard to progress made since the Conference, he pointed out that many countries had established national coordinating mechanisms for implementation of Agenda 21 and that three conventions had entered into force. Nevertheless, just when the developing countries were making an effort to implement Agenda 21 and to include the sustainable development approach in their economic development plans, they were in danger of failing because of the decline in official development assistance and the world financial crisis. Poverty had worsened and, consequently, so had environmental degradation.

34. The Group of 77 and China had noted with satisfaction the report of the Secretary-General on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon (A/53/487). In 1997 and 1998, many countries in Africa and Asia had experienced climate anomalies and natural disasters; moreover, forest fires had caused incalculable damage in Indonesia. Nevertheless, there was some cause for optimism. The experience of the affected countries would provide the necessary input for disaster prevention. The United Nations was in a position to implement a coordinated strategy. In that regard, the Group of 77 and China noted that the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, which coordinated relevant El Niño issues, was responsible, as task manager for the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, for the preparations for the special session on the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Group of 77 and China also

welcomed the international Decade-related conference that had been held in Potsdam, Germany, in September 1998, on early warning systems for the reduction of national disasters, and agreed with the Secretary-General that the prevention of negative impacts from future El Niño events must be the highest priority in international disaster management. The first intergovernmental meeting of experts on El Niño would be held in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in November 1998. At the current session, the Group of 77 and China, together with Mexico, would submit a draft resolution entitled "International cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon", and hoped that their partners would adopt the draft resolution by consensus.

35. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on utilization of the development dividend (A/53/374), the Group of 77 and China considered that such funds should be used only for development projects that were not mandated under the regular budget, and that the focus should be on projects with multiplier effects and which contributed to capacity-building, including human resources development. Member States had a role to play in defining the principles for the use of the development account.

36. **Mr. Glanzer** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union and the associated country Cyprus, said that encouraging progress had been made in the field of sustainable development, such as the adoption of the Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure, the replenishment of the Global Environment Facility and the holding of the second meeting of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. However, many environmental problems had been aggravated as a result of continuing poverty and production and consumption patterns that were not adapted to sustainable development. In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental issues must become an integral part of national policies and international cooperation. The European Union was well aware of that fact and was extremely concerned by the decline in official development assistance (ODA).

37. He stressed the need for improved coordination among the environmental conventions and their secretariats, and for an integrated approach that would put an end to the proliferation of meetings and mechanisms. The European Union attached great importance to the integration of an environmental dimension into all United Nations policies and activities. In that regard, it noted with satisfaction the recommendations made by the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, which the Secretary-General intended to implement on his own authority.

38. With regard to climate change, the Kyoto Protocol constituted a major step forward in the reduction of greenhouse gases. Nevertheless, before the Protocol could enter into force, many issues needed to be addressed, in particular the operation of flexible mechanisms, which should be governed by clearly defined and equitable criteria. The international community had endorsed the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, since such States were particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and he stressed the international community's responsibilities towards those States. In addition to the bilateral contributions of its member States, the European Union had committed over 1 billion ECU for the period 1996–2000 within the framework of the Lomé Convention.

39. He noted the importance of the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity for work programmes in many fields of biodiversity, including marine and coastal biodiversity, which would be a valuable contribution to the United Nations Year of the Oceans. The European Union also attached great importance to the conservation and sustainable use of forests, given the threats that they faced, as had been demonstrated by the recent forest fires in various parts of the world. Negotiations on a biosafety protocol should conclude in February 1999.

40. The European Union was the largest external source of financing for efforts to combat desertification. It welcomed the fact that a number of countries in Africa had already begun to include that concern in their development plans. In that context, the European Union supported, in particular, the "bottom-up" approach recommended in the Convention. It hoped that the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, to be held in Dakar in December 1998, would give new impetus to implementation of that instrument. The European Union reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable development.

41. **Mr. Valle** (Brazil), speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), welcomed the fact that the idea of sustainable development was gaining ground in public administration bodies and all sectors of civil society. The MERCOSUR countries supported the conclusions of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, and believed that many challenges must be met before the goals of Agenda 21 could be achieved. Sustainable development was inseparable from the problems of social development and population. Since 1992, poverty had increased, and with it environmental degradation; production and consumption patterns that conflicted with the interests of sustainable

development were still in common use, and pollution had increased. At a time when international cooperation was more essential than ever, there were those who sought to give a new interpretation to the basic principles of Agenda 21. While countries should work towards achieving sustainable development based on democracy, social justice and respect for the environment, for many developing countries the challenges far outweighed the means. International trading conditions must be made less hostile to such countries. As a first step, their exports should no longer be denied entry on the pretext of environmental protection. Furthermore, while poverty must be eliminated in the South, waste must be reduced in the North. Two conferences of the States parties to two conventions would be held in November 1998, and negotiations on a biosafety protocol were in progress. The MERCOSUR countries were following with interest the preparations for the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and its initiatives with respect to forests and freshwater. MERCOSUR provided its member States with a suitable framework for coordinating their environment and sustainable development policies.

42. **Ms. Linde** (United States of America) said that because the United States was blessed with extensive and varied forests, it had extensive experience in forest management and sustainable forestry. At the international level, her Government and that of Brazil would sponsor an international experts meeting in March 1999 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests had held its first substantive session in Geneva in the summer of 1998. That Forum had led to recommendations which must be implemented by, *inter alia*, applying the criteria and indicators established by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, prior to any debate over possible future instruments.

43. With regard to chemicals, an agreement on prior informed consent had just been completed, and work was under way on a second agreement on persistent organic pollutants. Her Government was convinced that the second of those issues should be addressed in a multilateral forum and was prepared to work constructively with other countries and to share its experience with them.

44. With respect to climate change, the United States would participate in an intergovernmental experts meeting on El Niño, to be held in Guayaquil, Ecuador, in November 1998. The impact of El Niño, though serious, had been limited in 1998 through preventive measures. Her Government would also like to share its experience in that field and looked forward to working with interested delegations on preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on the review of the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

45. **Mr. Chung Rae-kwon** (Republic of Korea) said that there had been meaningful progress in strengthening the legal framework for environmental management since the adoption of a new strategy for environmental protection at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. His delegation welcomed the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and the important achievements in the area of instruments relating to chemical safety and management and hoped that the ongoing negotiations on forests and persistent organic pollutants would be successfully concluded as scheduled.

46. His delegation also welcomed the recommendations made by the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements and considered that the recommendations concerning the organization of a ministerial-level environmental forum, the establishment of an environment management group and the development of coordination between environmental conventions should be considered in depth by the General Assembly in plenary session. It hoped that those recommendations would help to strengthen coordination between various institutions and to create synergies among all those involved in environment management.

47. However, his Government hoped that the Commission on Sustainable Development's unique role would be maintained. The new thematic approach adopted by the Commission at its most recent session, which involved the integration of sectoral and cross-sectoral themes and the participation of major groups and economic sectors, had proved extremely useful.

48. His Government welcomed the choice of sustainable consumption patterns as a cross-sectoral theme for the next session of the Commission. In order to promote consensus between developed and developing countries with respect to the encouragement of sustainable consumption patterns, the Republic of Korea would host an expert meeting on consumption patterns of East Asia in January 1999. The meeting would focus on the links between economic development and the environmental impact of consumption patterns; other matters to be considered included the links between rising income levels and the environmental impact of consumption; the impact of globalization in spreading the consumption patterns of developed countries to developing countries through trade, advertising and the media; and links between traditional lifestyles or cultural values and patterns of consumption.

49. Although the meeting would deal primarily with trends in East Asia, it would be open to all interested Governments. His Government believed that other developing countries experiencing rapid economic growth and the effects of globalization could benefit from the conclusions to be drawn at that meeting, the outcome of which would be reported on at the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and he expressed the hope that that initiative would help to promote consensus on sustainable consumption patterns.

50. **Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) said that it was important to preserve and strengthen the political impetus which the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly had given to the implementation of Agenda 21 at the global, regional and national levels. During the past year, several important international agreements on environmental protection had been concluded; the conventions adopted at, or as a result of, the Rio Conference had borne fruit; the process of negotiation on sustainable forest management had developed dynamically; and a productive discussion of the sustainable use of freshwater resources had led to agreed approaches. The Russian Federation was playing an active role in those processes and intended to further contribute to a solution to the environmental problems facing mankind.

51. The Commission on Sustainable Development and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), working in partnership with other United Nations programmes and specialized agencies and with the secretariats of environment- related conventions, should continue to serve as key mechanisms in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development. The decisions taken by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session had led to encouraging changes in the work of the Commission and of UNEP. His delegation hoped that the steps taken by the Commission at its sixth session would enable it to successfully implement its new multi-year programme of work and to make progress in solving the sectoral and cross-sectoral problems of highest priority.

52. His Government welcomed the revitalization of UNEP under the dynamic leadership of its new Executive Director and hoped that the reorganization of the United Nations environment sector, which was on the agenda of its current session, would help to strengthen the role of UNEP as the primary environmental component of the United Nations system. In that regard, he noted the contribution of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, which had submitted useful proposals and recommendations. However, some of those suggestions required considerable clarification.

53. As international environmental law developed and legal instruments for the regulation of policies and of interaction between States in the field of sustainable development increased, there was a growing need to ensure policy coherence and coordination of activities at the intergovernmental and inter-agency levels. In that context, the General Assembly's role must also evolve. The Assembly could no longer limit itself to separate consideration of the three conventions signed in Rio de Janeiro; rather, it should promote an integrated approach to consideration of the issue in a broader perspective, including the relationship between the conventions and other international legal instruments in the field of sustainable development.

54. The report on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions relating to sustainable development, submitted pursuant to General Assembly decision 52/445, was a step in the right direction. The report clearly defined the roles of all participants in that process. Generally speaking, his delegation supported the approach that was the basis for the recommendations made in the report, namely, that general policy decisions relating to the implementation of conventions was a sovereign prerogative of the Conferences of States parties to those conventions, whereas the role of United Nations bodies and of the General Assembly was to determine and understand the relationship between various international legal instruments and to make recommendations on ways of improving the performance thereof. Lastly, his delegation hoped that the General Assembly would prepare a specific resolution on that question.

55. **Ms. Wang** (China) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement made by Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had put forward the concept of harmonization between environment and development as the key to sustainable development. In recent years, many countries had endeavoured, with some success, to implement Agenda 21, and the concept of sustainable development had been widely accepted and integrated into various aspects of economic and social life.

56. Her delegation wished to comment on a number of conventions, and would do so under the relevant agenda item. While some progress had been made, the current environmental situation was hardly satisfactory, and the objectives set by the Rio Conference had by no means been attained: many developed countries had been unable to meet their commitments towards the developing countries and provide them with financial and technical assistance. ODA

continued to decline, and there was a trend towards justifying protectionist practices, on the grounds of environmental protection. All those factors hindered developing countries' efforts to achieve sustainable development.

57. The rapid advance of globalization and the tremendous progress that had been made in science and technology had not only resulted in unprecedented development, but had also posed a considerable challenge, especially for the developing countries. In addition to their efforts to eradicate poverty and promote economic development and environmental protection, the developing countries now had to cope with globalization.

58. The international community and the developed countries in particular, should, in the spirit of global partnership suggested by the Rio Conference, endeavour to take action on the consensus reached at the Conference. It should provide the promised financial and technical assistance and create conditions conducive to the development of the developing countries, taking the situation and special needs of those countries fully into account.

59. **Mr. Dausá Céspedes** (Cuba) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Since the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, important new information had come to light in the field of environment and sustainable development. Although the international community had reached new agreements, environmental degradation continued, and the developed countries had a long way to go in meeting their ODA commitments.

60. Cuba attached particular importance to the funding mechanisms provided for in each of the framework agreements and to the World Environment Fund, and was also following with great interest the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on follow-up to the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

61. The international community had acknowledged that the special needs and problems of small island States made them particularly vulnerable. While it was primarily up to those countries themselves to take appropriate action to achieve sustainable development, support from the international community remained indispensable, especially for the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action. In that connection, his delegation was convinced that the meeting between small island developing States and donors, to be held in February 1999, would lead to significant and concrete results with regard to financing of projects of importance to those countries.

62. If progress in sustainable development was to be achieved, greater financial assistance would not be enough. Efforts must also be made to increase technology transfers and technical assistance, which were two interdependent areas. It was important to strengthen the role of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), particularly in Africa. His delegation attached great importance to the in-depth consideration of the report of the United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements.

63. **Ms. Cardoze** (Panama), speaking on behalf of the States Members of the Rio Group, said that the heads of State and Government who had met in Panama in September had emphasized that the environment and sustainable development were highly complex issues that posed serious challenges to democracy and the sustainable integration of the countries of the region.

64. The States members of the Rio Group noted with concern that the problems considered at the Rio Conference six years earlier had worsened. Those problems included the destruction of fossil fuels, deforestation and the progressive increase in the levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

65. The Rio Group was determined to take concerted action to promote the implementation of Agenda 21 and the decisions taken at the Summit Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra. Cooperation and concerted action at the international level should proceed in accordance with Principle 7 of Agenda 21, namely that States had common but differentiated responsibilities.

66. The countries members of the Rio Group considered that the issues of environment and sustainable development were just as important as efforts to eradicate poverty and strengthen democracy. There could be no stable growth or sustainable development without equity and respect for human rights. For that reason, they supported all measures to improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population, such as the strengthening of programmes to broaden access to drinking water and the implementation of educational programmes to promote awareness of environmental, economic and social problems.

67. In the view of the Rio Group, the private sector had an important role to play in achieving a balance between environmental protection and economic growth. The latter should not occur at the expense of the environment and should not lead to the destruction of fragile ecosystems or

transboundary movements of hazardous wastes. The industrialized countries should help the developing countries manage their natural and energy resources by providing them with environmentally sound technologies.

68. The countries members of the Rio Group were committed to uniting their efforts to build a more prosperous world, and stressed that the ratification and implementation of international conventions on biological diversity, climate change and desertification were essential. Accordingly, they were currently developing programmes for the conservation, management and sustainable use of water, coastal and marine resources, which would enable them to achieve sustainable development and meet the basic needs of their people. The programmes in question should not be not only national but also regional and international.

69. The Rio Group considered that the international community should undertake an integrated study of the El Niño phenomenon, since it affected not merely one region but the entire world. In accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 52/200, it was essential to devise a comprehensive cooperation programme with a view to preventing the effects of El Niño and mitigating its impact. The Rio Group noted with satisfaction that the first intergovernmental meeting of experts on the El Niño phenomenon would be held in Guayaquil, Ecuador, from 9 to 13 November, and that an international meeting on the same topic would be held in Lima in 1999. The United Nations system should establish a mechanism or strategy that would afford a means of preventing the damage caused by El Niño. Before the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction came to an end, the international community should devise a strategy that included detection of the phenomenon, prevention of its effects, and planning for international action to reduce the impact of natural disasters.

70. The Rio Group intended to participate in the drafting of the draft resolution on strengthening the implementation of General Assembly resolution 52/200, which would be submitted during the current session. It was convinced that the adoption of appropriate economic policies and the committed participation of the industrialized countries and international financial institutions would make it possible to meet the challenges of sustainable development.

71. **Mr. Gerus** (Belarus) said that, although it was undeniable that considerable work had been done at the international, regional and national levels in the six years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to implement the recommendations contained in the documents which had resulted from the Conference, it had nevertheless been insufficient to reverse the negative trends observed concerning the spread of poverty and illiteracy, marginalization of the least developed countries, marine pollution and the ecological degradation of vast areas on all continents. The importance of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21 lay especially in the fact that the Assembly had defined the major avenues for the strengthening of international cooperation for the implementation of Agenda 21 and the mobilization of new energy to accelerate the process.

72. Belarus believed that it was still too early to assess the results of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 adopted at the nineteenth special session, but it was clear that its success largely depended on the extent to which the elements of the programme were reflected in the reform of the activities of the United Nations in the economic and social field. In that context, special attention must be paid to the need to adapt the operational funds and programmes of the United Nations system, as well as the regional commissions, to current demands.

73. His Government attached great importance to activities centred on the implementation of the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at the national level. In fact, that Conference had coincided with the beginning of transition towards a market economy. For six years, his country had been endeavouring simultaneously to ensure its transition to a market economy and realize sustainable development. It was focusing in particular on strengthening national capacity in the area of sustainable development and observing its related international commitments. A national strategy was currently being implemented to put Belarus on the road to sustainable development and lay the foundations for an appropriate new legislative framework.

74. Belarus had ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and the amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. It planned to ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol and would be prepared to sign an international convention on forests. Moreover, it was endeavouring to make a contribution to strengthening international cooperation in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development at the regional and subregional levels. In April 1997 it had hosted in Minsk an international conference on the sustainable development of the countries in transition which not only had led to better understanding of the most serious problems encountered by the States in the region but also to effective solutions. An international conference organized with the assistance of

United Nations representatives in the Republic of Belarus had opened in Minsk on 19 October on the topic of the environment and human rights. It was examining means of strengthening cooperation among States in order to create a better standard of living for their people and in particular to eliminate the lingering consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

75. His Government was currently studying the possibility of establishing a regional centre for sustainable development at Minsk. It was certain that the research activities and scientific studies oriented towards practical applications that would be conducted by the centre would serve the interests of all the countries of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

76. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that his country could enter into fruitful cooperation with all the members of the international community in the implementation of Agenda 21.

77. **Mr. Chouinard** (Canada) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts of the Secretary-General to improve the capacity of the United Nations to meet the challenges of the new millennium. It welcomed the recommendations of the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements, in particular those aimed at improving inter-agency coordination with regard to the environment and developing synergies between the multilateral environmental conventions. It would be useful to establish a forum where environment ministers could discuss the major global environmental issues and provide policy direction.

78. Climate change stood out as the most serious problem, and Canada's signing of the Kyoto Protocol in April underlined its commitment to early action. The international community must work together to facilitate the implementation of the commitments contained in the Kyoto Protocol and the reduction of global emissions of greenhouse gases. Early agreement on international flexibility mechanisms was also particularly important. Emissions trading and projects to reduce emissions would help the States parties to the Protocol to meet their obligations.

79. Given the level of global emissions, environmental objectives might not be met unless action was taken by a broader range of countries. Climate change mitigation and efforts to improve energy efficiency could contribute both to economic growth and competitiveness and to sustainable development. Canada hoped that the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Climate Change to be held in Buenos Aires in November 1998 would result in an agreement on a work plan and timetable to implement the key provisions of the Kyoto Protocol.

80. The issue of forests was also highly important, and in February 1999, Canada would co-host with Costa Rica the first of a series of meetings to facilitate technical discussions on legally binding instruments on all types of forests.

81. The Barbados Conference was one of the great achievements of the United Nations in the area of sustainable development. Canada supported the preparatory process for the special session of 1999 and would participate in the donor conference in February 1999. It commended the Alliance of Small Island Developing States for its initiatives and actions.

82. Canada welcomed the positive outcome of the Rotterdam diplomatic conference which had adopted the Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, signed by 57 countries. It continued to be very concerned by the serious risk that persistent organic pollutants (POPs) posed to human health and the environment. It had signed the Aarhus Protocol on POPs and intended to ratify the protocols on POPs and on heavy metals before the end of 1998. It had also recently hosted the first meeting of the intergovernmental negotiating committee for a legally binding global instrument on persistent organic pollutants.

83. Canada was one of the 167 States parties to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, and, over the past 10 years, had fulfilled all the commitments it had made. In that connection, it was determined to continue to play an active role in the implementation of the Protocol.

84. Canada, which was bordered by three oceans, attached great importance to ocean management. It had taken a leading role in promoting the activities of the International Year of the Ocean in 1998, notably by agreeing to sponsor the signature of the ocean charter, one of the main initiatives of the Year. It was one of the first countries to have adopted a law on the oceans, providing a legal basis for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

85. In its capacity as Chair of the Arctic Council, Canada had recently hosted the first ministerial meeting of the Council, a new international organization founded to foster cooperation and coordination among Arctic countries. The member countries of the Council had developed a new model of partnership, conferring on groups representing indigenous peoples the status of permanent participants.

86. Addressing global environmental problems and enabling all countries to achieve sustainable development

represented the major challenges facing the United Nations at the dawn of the new millennium.

87. **Mr. Loizou** (Cyprus) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, and that all countries should espouse the principles of sustainable development. Cyprus had adopted an environmental action plan and had made the sustainability of social and economic policies one of the main aspects of its strategic development plan. It had also drafted a new environmental protection bill. As a result of those efforts, the state of the environment in Cyprus was generally satisfactory. The main problems encountered were due to the urbanization of coastal areas, land use, infrastructure projects, the production of energy, the overuse of natural resources and tourism.

88. The past decade had been decisive for Cyprus in that emphasis had been placed on the social aspects of development and on the environment. The improvement of living standards and the protection of the environment and the cultural heritage were the basic aims of the country's development process.

89. Cyprus was a member of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development. The Commission's priorities were coastal area management, raising public awareness, water management and the integration of environmental concerns in development policies. The environment and respect for fundamental human rights were indivisible, the right to live in an environment of high quality having been recognized by the General Assembly as a fundamental right in its Declaration on the Right to Development. Sustainable development was linked to the right of peoples to sovereignty over their natural wealth and resources, as stated in the communiqué issued by the heads of State of the Alliance of Small Island States at the 1994 Barbados Conference. Cyprus, because of its history, fully understood the concerns of the small island States, whose environment and security were under ever greater threat. Sadly, it understood how acts of aggression and occupation could cause suffering among the population, the destruction of economic resources and great damage to the environment and the cultural heritage.

90. Cyprus was particularly concerned at plans to build a nuclear power plant in an area of high seismic risk, opposite its northern coast. The severe drought which had afflicted the country for the past four years was another cause for anxiety. Because of a lack of fossil fuels, Cyprus had been making ever greater use of solar energy and had become one of the leading consumers of that energy source. It stood ready to share its experience and expertise in that sphere with small countries facing similar problems. In that connection, his Government was considering convening, following the Review Conference of the Barbados Programme of Action, a meeting to identify practical solutions to the challenges facing small island States.

91. There was a need to raise awareness of environmental problems at all levels of the public and private sectors through interactive communication. While Cyprus welcomed the adoption of an increasing number of environmental rules, regulations and standards, the need to enhance cooperation and consultation with the private sector must be emphasized. It urged the non-governmental organizations, which made a vital contribution, to strengthen their role in the field of environmental protection.

92. Education was the key to environmental protection, and well-structured programmes must therefore be put in place at the national level in order to raise awareness among current and future generations of decision makers of the problems of protecting the environment and defending the national and global heritage.

93. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway) said that, while there were encouraging examples to illustrate the progress made towards the goal of sustainable development since the Rio Conference and the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, that progress was slow and uneven and numerous threats to the environment remained.

94. Agenda 21 and the other documents produced by the Rio Conference provided a comprehensive and sufficiently accurate description of the interconnections, the type of measures to be taken and the resources necessary to achieve the desired results. Recent developments, including the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, the negotiations for the development of a protocol on biosafety, the adoption of a legally binding instrument on the prior informed consent (PIC) procedure for certain hazardous chemicals, and the continuing dialogue on sustainable forest management, were contributing to the effective implementation of the commitments made in Rio. In no other area had international law been developed to the same extent in recent years as in that of the environment and sustainable development.

95. There were many complex reasons why more was not being done. For example, Governments faced very varied demands and had to reconcile many different elements in their policies. In so doing, it was necessary always to have in mind the long-term perspective required for achieving sustainable development. Furthermore, the estimated resource requirements for implementing Agenda 21 were far from having been met and further efforts must be made to

mobilize additional resources. The innovative mechanisms provided for in the Kyoto Protocol promised much with respect to the mobilization of resources. They could not, however, either replace official development assistance or compensate for its unfortunate decline.

96. The United Nations continued to focus on sustainable development and had achieved considerable progress in ensuring the consistency and coordination of activities and avoiding duplication. Nonetheless, there was still much room for improvement. The United Nations Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements had recommended a number of actions to improve the situation. His delegation would address that question at a later stage.

97. The international community must also be better prepared to deal with the unexpected. The recent financial crisis was a case in point. When certain countries' economies were in turmoil and the financial impact was felt world wide, it was difficult to give priority to long-term objectives such as sustainable development. Efforts to improve the international financial system must seek to reduce fluctuations and, at the same time, take social consequences more fully into account in order to maintain the focus on sustainable development. Another example was the El Niño phenomenon. Its effects could well negate the progress achieved over several years. It was widely recognized that the United Nations needed an early warning mechanism and an emergency-response capacity to deal with environmental disasters and emergencies.

98. Lastly, a basic premise of sustainable development must not be overlooked, namely, the need for an integrated, cross-sectoral approach combining environmental, economic and social concerns. Reverting to past tendencies — which encouraged fragmentation, narrowly sectoral approaches and unidisciplinarity — would reduce all the efforts to naught and waste valuable time and resources.

99. **Mr. Arbel** (Israel) said that, as a country with limited natural resources, Israel had striven to make the best possible use of its available resources while, at the same time, ensuring that their intensive use was not harmful to the environment. Paradoxically, those constraints had challenged Israeli scientists to develop a host of new technologies which placed Israel at the forefront of world development in a number of environmental fields.

100. With regard to water management, since surface and groundwater sources were not sufficient to meet the demands of a growing population and economy, Israel had had to develop ways of using treated wastewater, brackish water and water harvesting techniques. It played a leading role in the development of drip irrigation, by which relatively small amounts of water were delivered directly to the roots of growing plants. That technique had the further advantage of reducing salinization, enabling farmers to deliver precise quantities of fertilizers to the roots and thereby prevent soil and groundwater contamination.

101. Agricultural research had played a catalytic role in the development of crops which either required minimal amounts of water or were able to thrive on brackish water. Israel was also very active in the field of forestry, where it had obtained remarkable results with respect to biological diversity and productivity, and it was closely associated with regional and international efforts to combat desertification and promote sound management of land and water resources.

102. Israel was a world pioneer in the utilization of solar energy, not only for low-technology domestic use but also cutting-edge technology for solar power stations. It had developed a new type of coating that made it possible for solar panels to retain a higher proportion of the solar energy they absorbed. That development had led to a decision to equip all residential and commercial buildings in the country with solar water heaters.

103. With respect to past management, various methods which mitigated damage to the environment were currently being developed, for example, a soil solarization technique designed and perfected by an Israeli, which reduced damage to the ozone layer, and biological control methods which replaced the use of chemicals. In 1976, a bacterium that had proved to be particularly effective in controlling certain species of flies and mosquitoes had been discovered in a puddle in the Negev region. Called Bacillus Israelensis, it had proved to be valuable in countries where insects transmitted serious diseases, particularly in Africa. Israel was more than willing to share its experience and know-how with all countries interested in environmental research.

104. **Mr. Robu** (Republic of Moldova) welcomed the Second Committee's adoption, at the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, of decision 52/444 on the implementation of and follow-up to the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including the outcome of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. That Conference and the meeting of the General Assembly had prompted his country to consider the principles contained in Agenda 21 in carrying out its socio-economic development programme and to contribute to the efforts to resolve global ecological problems.

105. The political will of the Government of the Republic of Moldova had been expressed by the adoption of the National Agenda on Environmental Protection and the

ratification of the major international environment-related conventions. At the same time, it devoted considerable attention to regional and subregional cooperation, particularly in the basins of the Danube River and within the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation. His delegation was aware that the implementation of Agenda 21 implied active participation by all the parties involved: the Government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, scientific circles and local communities. In that context, changes for the better had taken place in his country, particularly with regard to the strengthening of cooperation among government agencies, scientific societies and non-governmental organizations.

106. It was widely known that, in the current situation, humankind could not afford to pursue the goal of economic growth at the expense of the degradation of natural resources and environmental pollution. It was therefore essential to prevent the utilization of environmentally harmful technologies and the countries in transition, which included the Republic of Moldova, must not be viewed as markets for the sale of such technologies. Moreover, the implementation of the recommendations of the Rio Conference should be accelerated, particularly those regarding the transfer of environmentally safe and highly effective technologies to those countries.

107. The negative consequences of global climate change also affected all countries but particularly those whose economies were predominantly agriculture-based. That was the case of the Republic of Moldova, where abnormal weather conditions had considerably increased in the past two decades. Lastly, it was highly desirable to implement the transfer of environmentally safe technologies among countries, including to the transition countries, on a multilateral basis through UNDP and UNEP.

108. It was certainly possible to resolve environmental problems, provided that declarations and political appeals were followed up by practical steps and financial contributions. At the same time, responsibility must be shared at the global level, taking into account the degree of damage countries caused to the world environment.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.